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SUBJECT: GEORGIA/RUSSIA: NATO ALLIES DEMARCHE MFA

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Eric S. Rubin for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. On August 5, in response to a NATO Quad Allies' demarche on Georgia, MFA IVth CIS director Kelin insisted that Russia had not been invited to the 31 July Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meeting, but conceded that the Russian-Georgian hotline was not functioning July 30-31. Kelin expressed regret that President Obama raised the telephone difficulties with Medvedev during their August 4 telephone call. In a TV interview, FM Lavrov accused Georgia of calling for the U.S. to join the EUMM in order to then provoke an incident that would pit the U.S. directly against Russia. In a press conference, Acting FM Karasin accused the U.S. and Ukraine of providing Georgia with military assistance, but like Lavrov praised the role of the EUMM in Georgia. Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Nogovitsyn said in a separate press conference that Russia did not plan to establish a monitoring system along the Georgian border, and would not increase its service personnel in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Accusing Georgia of taking deliveries of military equipment, he claimed there was "exhaustive evidence" proving Georgia was the aggressor in the August 2008 conflict, and said there was "historical precedent for the punishment of aggressors at the end of wars." End Summary

Demarche

12. (C) On August 5, NATO Quad Allies jointly demarched MFA IVth CIS director Andrey Kelin regarding the rising tensions with Georgia (reftel). In addition to registering concern about Russia's absence on 31 July from the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meeting, we deplored Russia's failure to answer Georgian attempts to contact military representatives in South Ossetia July 31 via the hotline, and called on Russia to work through international mechanisms. The Allies urged Russia to permit the EUMM and other bodies to access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and noted that a similar demarche would be delivered in Tbilisi August 6.

13. (C) In response, Kelin reiterated that Russia had not been invited to the 31 July IPRM meeting in question. He said EUMM Deputy Head of Mission Gilles Janvier had called for two meetings that day, one in the morning, to which Russia was invited, and one in the afternoon, to which Janvier only invited Georgian and South Ossetian representatives. Kelin conceded that the hotline was not functioning July 30-31, but assured that the MFA had intervened with the MOD to have it fixed and staffed at all times. Kelin expressed regret that President Obama had

raised the telephone difficulties with Medvedev during their August 4 telephone call, saying that Medvedev was not prepped to answer and did not know details, and that it would have been better to have pursued the question at the working level. Kelin appreciated recent calls by Vice President Biden, the EU Presidency, and the OSCE to the GOG to urge restraint.

Lavrov

¶4. (U) In an interview broadcast August 5 on Vesti TV, FM Lavrov said Russia had not planned to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia prior to the August 2008 conflict, but had to do so to save Ossetian and Abkhazian lives. He accused Georgia of pursuing a policy of aggression and provocation, including by calling for the U.S. to join the EUMM in anticipation of provoking an incident that would pit the U.S. directly against Russia. Along with the Russian troop presence, Lavrov termed the Sarkozy-Medvedev plan and the EU Monitoring Mission the plan engendered "stabilizers" of the situation.

¶5. (SBU) Conceding that Russia was losing the information war, Lavrov described statements calling for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and recognize that country's territorial integrity an "echo of old thinking" based on "inertia" that would pass. He stated that a UN internal report held President Saakashvili responsible for starting the August war, while those who insisted on the opposite were "not telling the truth for the sake of their own ideological

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projects."

¶6. (SBU) Despite differences in opinion, Lavrov said Georgia no longer impeded the development of U.S.-Russian relations, as confirmed by President Obama's July visit.

Karasin

¶7. (SBU) In an August 5 press conference, DFM Karasin described ASD Vershbow's statement that the U.S. was not supplying military equipment to Georgia as "only partially true," citing U.S. training and equipment deliveries that "help and have helped the Georgian military." He said Russia "knew" Ukraine, among others, supplied weapons to Ukraine, and noted President Medvedev's January decree allowing for sanctions against countries supplying weapons to Georgia.

¶8. (SBU) Acknowledging that the tone of the U.S. administration on Georgia issues had "improved" considerably since last year, Karasin expressed hope that the new NATO SYG would change that organization's tone, too. Karasin welcomed Vice President Biden's rejection of any use of force in the Caucasus, and said that during their August 4 phone call, Presidents Obama and Medvedev discussed the Georgian issue as two "reasonable and knowledgeable leaders who understand how dangerous the region is."

¶9. (SBU) Karasin praised the EUMM for its good work on the Georgian side of the administrative boundary line (ABL), but called on Georgia to cooperate with international mechanisms and South Ossetia, while recognizing the "new reality" and "new borders."

¶10. (SBU) Karasin accused the international media of bias against Russia and Abkhazia/South Ossetia, charging they were "duped" by Saakashvili and pro-Georgia lobbyists in the West. He stated that 162 South Ossetians were killed in the August 2008 war; 48 Russian military personnel killed; 5143 people wounded; and 165 buildings in Tskhinvali destroyed. Currently, 390 construction projects were underway; 800 Russian FSB border guards/military personnel were maintaining

the South Ossetian ABL; and 1,500 Russian military personnel would be stationed in South Ossetia, as well as 1,500 in Abkhazia, by the end of 2009. He said the Russian forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia would deliver a "sobering blow" to Georgia if it attacked the regions, and noted Georgia refused, "without giving any explanation," to sign non-use of force agreements with the regions.

Nogovitsyn

¶11. (SBU) In an August 5 press conference, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Col. Gen Anatoliy Nogovitsyn said Russia did not plan to establish a monitoring system along the Georgian border, and would not increase the number of service personnel in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, currently at 2,240. While stating Russia was doing everything possible to make sure the events from last August did not repeat, and saying Russia had no plans to assault and disarm Georgia, he argued Georgia was taking deliveries of military equipment and had "serious" funds available for that effort. He clarified that there was currently no evidence that Georgia planned to attack South Ossetia again, and said he thought Georgia was not prepared to do so, calling any such attempt "political suicide" for Georgia's leaders.

¶12. (SBU) Claiming there was "exhaustive evidence" proving Georgia was the aggressor in the August 2008 conflict, Nogovitsyn quoted at length from what he called military orders for the Georgian Armed Forces signed July 26, 2008, detailing a planned offensive operation against South Ossetia. Nogovitsyn also accused Georgia of flying Su-25 fighters with Russian markings in order to provoke armed conflict. Nogovitsyn repeatedly referred to the upcoming report of European Union's Fact Finding Mission, saying the documents the mission submitted proved Georgia was the aggressor. He said Georgia's leadership therefore should be punished -- although "no decisions had been made yet as to the form and method of such punishment" -- and noted "historical precedent for the punishment of aggressors at the end of wars", such as World War I and World War II. Nogovitsyn then addressed Russian losses during the conflict,

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saying that 64 Russian service members had been killed, including 15 peacekeepers, which differed slightly from Karasin's statistics. Nogovitsyn also stated that Russia had no intention of returning the "Hummers" it had captured last year, as it considered them war trophies in accordance with the Law of War.

Comment

¶13. (C) In the run-up to the first anniversary of the beginning of military operations by Georgia and Russia, Russian authorities have taken a tough, firm line in the press -- in general supported by public opinion -- but have been assuring us and others privately that they do not envision, or want, a repeat or rekindling of last year's conflict. The demarche delivered today made clear that we and Allies look to Russia -- and Georgia -- to exercise restraint. Toning down the public rhetoric on both sides must also be an element of that de-escalation.

RUBIN